Biofeedback Certification 101

Fred Shaffer, PhD, BCIAC, 1 Judy Crawford, 2 and Randy Neblett, LPC, BCIAC 3

1 Truman State University, Kirksville, MO; 2 Biofeedback Certification Institute of America, Wheat Ridge, CO; 3 Productive Rehabilitative Institute of Dallas for Ergonomics (PRIDE), Dallas, TX

Keywords: BCIA, NOCA, certification, licensure

Who Is BCIA?
The Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (BCIA) is the premier international certifying organization for biofeedback professionals. BCIA consists of an executive director, a director of certification, and nine volunteer Board members. Board members are chosen to represent our diverse stakeholders and serve for 3-year terms. Experienced professionals assist the Board through their participation on task forces that help us complete critical projects such as exam revision and expansion of biofeedback training at leading universities.

The BCIA was formed in January 1981 to establish and maintain professional standards for the provision of biofeedback services and to certify those who meet these standards. We are proud of this credential. BCIA certificants belong to a distinguished group of biofeedback professionals who have worked hard to meet competency standards in biofeedback to provide credibility for their skills and to better serve consumers. Through BCIA’s recertification program, they have been required to maintain ethical standards and further enhance their clinical skills through continuing education.

How Is BCIA Related to AAPB, BFE, and ISNR?
The Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (AAPB), Biofeedback Foundation of Europe (BFE), International Society for Neurofeedback Research (ISNR), and state and regional biofeedback societies are completely separate membership organizations and our valued partners in advancing the field. BCIA certifies biofeedback professionals whereas these societies promote research, offer educational programs, organize meetings, and publish journals and newsletters.

What Is BCIA’s Mission?
BCIA certifies individuals who meet education and training standards in biofeedback and progressively recertifies those who satisfy continuing education requirements. In doing so, we strive to protect the welfare of biofeedback consumers, to provide credibility to biofeedback practitioners, and to advance the field of biofeedback.

What Is BCIA’s Vision?
BCIA certification is recognized as the international gold standard for demonstrating knowledge and competency in the use of biofeedback.

What Are BCIA’s Values?
The public has a right to efficacious treatment from competent certified biofeedback professionals.

Certified biofeedback providers practice ethically and operate within the scope of their professions.

Certification standards are based on credible biofeedback research and clinical efficacy.

Recipients and payers will recognize the benefits of biofeedback and will choose BCIA-certified providers.

What Is Certification?
The National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA) defines professional certification as “a voluntary process by which a non-governmental entity grants a time-limited recognition and use of a credential to an individual after verifying that he or she has met predetermined standardized criteria.”

NOCA is the membership body and the leader in setting quality standards for credentialing organizations. BCIA is proud to be a member of NOCA, and in fact, Dr. Francine
Butler, BCIA’s executive director, played a crucial role in the development of this organization and just finished a term as its president.

NOCA’s Web site states, “The certification of specialized skill-sets affirms a knowledge and experience base for practitioners in a particular field, their employers, and the public at large. Certification represents a declaration of a particular individual’s professional competence.”

**Why BCIA Certification?**

BCIA certification is recognized by AAPB and ISNR as the international gold standard in biofeedback certification, and the Mayo Clinic’s Web site directs patients to consult BCIA to find qualified therapists.

Unlike certification mills that change their name and Web site every 12 months, BCIA has collaborated with our stakeholders to protect biofeedback consumers and establish the credibility of biofeedback for the past 27 years. We have earned our stakeholders’ trust by establishing the relevant and credible standards needed to ensure the integrity of the field at a time when increasing numbers of hobbyists play with equipment and pretend to treat conditions outside the scope of their competence.

**How Is Certification Different From Licensure?**

As defined by NOCA, “Licensure is the mandatory process by which a government agency grants time-limited permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation after verifying that he/she has met predetermined and standardized criteria.” Although there are similarities in that individuals must demonstrate some educational and proficiency standards and take a test, certification is not licensure. A professional license is regulated by a state or federal agency and allows one to work legally within a specific occupational field. Certification only provides recognition that that one has met a defined proficiency standard. Certification can provide credibility to a professional, but it does not provide any legal basis for one to practice independently. BCIA certificants who are unlicensed and who are treating medical and/or psychological disorders must work within the guidelines of their state laws. This often involves working under the legal supervision of a licensed professional.

**How Does BCIA Certification Differ From a Certificate of Completion?**

BCIA certification means that a professional has agreed to abide by the BCIA Ethical Principles and practice within all applicable laws and the rules and boundaries of his or her profession. A practitioner must demonstrate entry-level competence by completing didactic education, completing supervised personal training and client training, and taking a written exam. A certificate of completion is a statement that an individual has finished an educational program but does not attest to an individual’s knowledge of biofeedback or training experience. Furthermore, a certificate of completion does not require a commitment to ethical principles and practice within the scope of a profession.

**What Does “Practice Within the Scope of a Profession” Mean?**

With rare exceptions (e.g., the state of New York), federal and state statutes do not license biofeedback practice. Although many biofeedback practitioners see biofeedback as an independent profession, these laws treat biofeedback only as a modality that is shared by many professions. When biofeedback is used by a licensed professional, biofeedback is a modality of that profession. Thus, for a physical therapist, biofeedback is a physical therapy modality. Although certification means that an individual has demonstrated entry-level competence, it does not authorize an individual to practice outside applicable statutes. For example, a counselor or clinical psychologist should not diagnose and treat hypertension or severe headache without medical evaluation. A certificant should also practice within the boundaries of expertise. For example, a physician should not provide quantitative electroencephalography analysis for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder after attending a single weekend workshop.

**How Should You Market Your BCIA Certification?**

We are developing marketing tools that you will be able to download from our Web site. Within applicable state laws and the rules of your professional membership organization, you can display your BCIA credential after your degree on your advertising, business cards, letterhead, meeting name badge, and press releases.

When you give interviews or talks about biofeedback, you should consider educating your audience about the importance of selecting a BCIA-certified professional. You can direct them to the BCIA Web site, which allows consumers and referring professionals to search for a certified provider by zip code. We also encourage you to regularly update your listing on our Web site to help you better reach prospective clients.

The more effectively you market your certification, the greater the professional recognition you will gain from it.
Feedback
We’d like to hear more about your questions regarding BCIA certification. Let us know what you think! Join us and help us to maintain our now famous tagline: More than qualified—BCIA certified!

There are a myriad of websites advertising health insurance for independent contractors, each promising more than the last. But when choosing a health plan to protect your family, you need to rely on someone you trust.

The Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback is pleased to make available health insurance options through the AAPB-endorsed Professional Liability insurance Program. These are real, comprehensive health insurance plans that may include office and prescription medication co-pays, a wide network of doctors, hospitals and other options depending on which configuration you choose. Plans are available for independent contractors, freelancers or other self-employed people and their families. There are also group plans for businesses interested in adding this valuable benefit to their company.

Group Plans:
Designed for employer groups of 2 to 50 employees, these plans are available to all full-time, permanent employees. As a small group, employers are involved in the process of acquiring the plan and determining which plan options to offer. With small group insurance, your program agent will help you determine the right plan for you and your employees.

Individual Plans:
The ultimate flexibility in plan options and availability, individual medical plans are offered to you, your family and your employees, regardless of whether they are full or part time. These plans are individually customized to fit the specific needs of the person applying for coverage and the quote/application process is simplified by our online system.

Find out more about our health insurance plans at the AAPB Insurance Center: www.aapb.lockton-ins.com. To speak directly with a program agent about your health insurance needs, call us at 1-888-830-2272.

Not all health plans available in all states. Insurance Program administered by Lockton Risk Services, Inc.